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Chapter 11

From NWICO to global governance of the information society

Ulla Carlsson

We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, assembled in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003 for the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Declaration of Principles, "Building the Information Society: A Global Challenge in the New Millennium"

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These words preface the political plan of action adopted by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva in December 2003. This was not the first time the international community had set out to draft policy on information and communication issues in a global arena.

Information and communication have occupied the United Nations system since its early years. In the first years after the war, optimism prevailed: technological advances were seen to hold the promise of enabling all the peoples of the world to exchange and diffuse information at will, thereby promoting knowledge and mutual understanding among peoples and nations. As early as 1946, one year after the UN was founded, the 'free flow of information' principle

194 | was agreed on. Two years later, in 1948, the UN summoned its member nations to an International Conference on Freedom of Information; that same year, the UN also adopted a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The principles were adopted in consensus. The framework for the normative role UNESCO assumed in this period is perhaps best captured in the following excerpts from the two principal documents:

All states should proclaim policies under which the free flow of information within countries and across frontiers will be protected. The right to seek and transmit information should be insured in order to enable the public to ascertain facts and appraise events... (*Calling of an International Conference on Freedom of Information*, FN resolution 1946-12-14).

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 19, FN 1948-12-10).

It was with the founding of the UN and UNESCO that norm-setting in relation to information and communication was elaborated on an international plane. Otherwise, communication was one of the very first sectors to be subjected to international regulation. The International Telegraph Union (ITU, subsequently International Telecommunication Union), one of the oldest international organizations, was founded in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1947, the ITU was made a specialized agency of the United Nations and charged with regulating and planning telecommunications services throughout the world.

In the beginning, the normative role of the UN and UNESCO was closely aligned with work relating to the protection of human rights, but in the 1960s technological advances in the field of telecommunication introduced a need for international regulation of an entirely new kind, such as rules for the use of space for communications satellites. Consequently, questions concerning information assumed a new political valence or charge, and discussion of them revolved increasingly around the doctrine of free flows of information. The spirit of consensus that had prevailed in 1948 had degenerated into a climate of confrontation and conflict. The debate was to have a crucial influence on the work of UNESCO, which was the main arena for these issues for nearly twenty years, from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s.

Chronic imbalances in international information flows became the focus of attention, and a new doctrine concerning 'the free flow of information' emerged. The situation had its roots in the tumultuous process of national liberation from imperial powers that had swept through Asia and Africa in the preceding decade. The new states demanded recognition of their sovereignty—in politics, economics and the cultural sphere. At the same time, the new nations were in need of aid from the industrialized countries of the North. National and eco-

conomic development was the first priority, and the mass media were seen to play key roles in the process.

In the Cold War era the newly independent countries of the third world were of strategic importance to both East and West. Development aid was an important factor in 'winning the hearts and minds' of developing nations. New patron-client relationships emerged; old, established ones changed. The successes achieved by the oil-producing countries of OPEC in the 1970s strengthened the position of the third world as a bargaining partner (albeit rising fuel prices had serious impacts on some developing countries). In succeeding years, the third world made its voice heard in international fora as never before, formulating programmes for far-reaching reform. A set of demands that would result in a New International Economic Order was put on the agenda; demands for reform of existing patterns of news and information flows – in short: *a new international information order* – were soon to follow. But a new international information order, in the sense its advocates intended, was not to be. After some brief years of debate, the issue disappeared from international agendas, and discussion of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) also waned in the North – though not in the South.

In the first years of the new millennium, information and communication issues have resurfaced in the global arena in a somewhat different guise: the *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)*. The UN, UNESCO and the ITU are all involved in the new arena, where information and communication issues are primarily treated in terms relating to 'global governance'. It is these most recent developments that form the starting point for the present chapter, which analyses the rise and fall of the NWICO with particular attention to structural and institutional aspects of the media and communication system and the actions of various actors in the arena of international politics¹. With the NWICO as a backdrop, a discussion then follows of the information order of today in relation to processes of globalization, media developments in third world countries and, ultimately, our understanding of 'development'. The chapter concludes with a few remarks concerning the efforts being made within the framework of the WSIS to apply a governance perspective to fundamental issues relating to information and communication in the world today.

The international media system

The principal complaints that the third world voiced in the 1970s, and which subsequently evolved into the demand for a new international information order, concerned the imbalance of information flows (in the case of news vir-

1 The findings of the study are reported in full in Ulla Carlsson, *Frågan om en ny internationell informationsordning; en studie i internationell mediepolitik* (The issue of a New World and Information Order; a study in media politics), Göteborg: Göteborg University, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication, 1998. See also Ulla Carlsson, "The Rise and Fall of NWICO. From a Vision of International Regulation to a Reality of Multilevel Governance", *Nordicom Review* (2003) 2, pp. 31-68.

196 | tually a 'one-way flow'); the general disrespect for third world peoples' cultural identities that the imbalance reflected; the hegemony of transnational communications companies (perceived as a threat to the nations' independence) and the inequitable distribution of communications resources among regions of the world.

A rich body of research confirmed the validity of the complaints. The studies documented the imbalance of flows between developed and developing countries, between North and South. The international system of communications was designed to serve the needs of the industrialized countries. A small number of transnational companies controlled the markets for news and for communications technology. Developing countries had no choice but to make use of the structures created by and for the industrialized regions of the world. National media systems in the third world remained poorly developed; many were state-controlled. Poorly developed and economically weak, mass media were unable to report news events in their own countries or to report world events to their national audiences. As a consequence, they were heavily dependent on international news agencies. The material these agencies carried was strongly event-oriented and superficial, personifying and dramatizing events of the day (Bishop, 1975; Boyd-Barrett, 1977; Harris, 1976; Höhne, 1977; Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974; Tunstall, 1977; Schramm, 1980; Varis, 1977).

Mass media in the development process: ideology and strategy

The two main focal points in the issue of a new international information order were the role of the media and mass communication in the development of society and the relationship between industrialized and developing countries.

The development process was strategically important in the industrialized countries' contest for the third world. The emergence of new media technology highlighted the role of the media in this process. Scholars who studied national development in the postwar era through the 1960s identified phenomena in the development process that formed the nuclei of two separate paradigms: the paradigm of modernization and the paradigm of dependence, the latter a reaction to the former. Whereas the modernization paradigm saw the problems of developing countries as consequences of historical factors, the dependency paradigm pointed to contemporary causes: underdevelopment as a consequence of capitalism, expressed as colonialism and imperialism.

The 'free flow of information' concept was formulated in the USA in the final throes of the Second World War. No national frontiers should be allowed to hinder the flow of information between countries. Even while the war was still raging, it was apparent that the USA would emerge from it as a world power. The Americans saw before them a world without colonial ties, a world that lay open to a robust, expansive American economy. The information sector was a key fac-

tor in paving the way for economic expansion. People everywhere were tired of the propaganda and censorship that were part of the war effort and welcomed the thought of 'free flows' warmly. The idea of a 'free flow of information' was spread over the world. It was particularly important to win support for the concept in the United Nations and especially its specialized agency, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation). Thus, UNESCO came to be the main arena in which information and communication issues were debated in the postwar period.

UNESCO had two prime roles: it provided assistance and it established norms. The first of these roles related directly to the development effort and 'modernization'. But when, in the 1960s, proponents of the dependency paradigm called the concept of modernization into question and demanded reform, it was the first of what came to be known as the 'wars of ideas'. The ideological components of the two paradigms provided the terms for the will to reform represented in the call for a new international information order, and UNESCO's norm-setting role was to become the portal through which the third world's demands made their way onto the international agenda (cf. Eek, 1979).

The rise of the NWICO

The non-aligned countries introduced the demand for a new international information order in the mid-1970s as an extension of already voiced demands for a new world economic order. Although the non-aligned countries could hardly be considered a unit in terms of ideology or political-economic systems, and as a group had leanings toward both of the major blocs, they maintained a remarkably united front on the issue of a new international information order (cf. Sing and Gross, 1984). That the demand for reform of the international communications system arose out of the non-aligned camp was hardly sheer chance (Hamelink, 1979). A prime factor was the tumultuous change that was taking place in the world oil market. The 'OPEC Crisis' or 'fuel crisis' of 1973 broke a position of near-total dominance that the USA had enjoyed for over a century and won the non-aligned countries an unprecedented bargaining position.

After 1973, the issue was no longer a question of national liberation in a strictly political, juridical sense but ambitions extended into the economic and cultural spheres as well, which, of course, sharply challenged prevailing power relationships. The new international information order rested on four cornerstones, the 'four Ds': democratization of the flows of information between countries; decolonialization, i.e. self-determination, national independence and cultural identity; demonopolization, i.e. setting limits on the activities of transnational communications companies; and development, i.e. national communication policy, strengthening of infrastructure, journalism education, and regional cooperation (cf. Nordenstreng, 1984). The media, particularly news flows, were central. A new way of looking at development was evident; its ingredients were tenets arguing that development presumes self-determination and cultural identity, and

198 | recipient countries should control the aid received. Add to this an international perspective, and a commitment to regional cooperation.

The third world's complaints and the demands for a new international information order that were raised in UNESCO developed into a bitter struggle that came to a head in the work on a 'declaration on the media' in the period 1974-1978². But it was issues relating to satellite communication and the need to regulate the new technology which portended a change in climate within UNESCO. The General Conference of 1972 adopted a resolution put forward by the Soviet Union that set out principles for how satellites might be used for the exchange of news, information and cultural expressions³. The vote was 55 for, 7 against, with 22 abstentions. Astoundingly, the USA had been outvoted. In the ensuing years, the West frequently found itself in the minority as third world countries tended to vote with the Eastern bloc.

The MacBride Commission

Just as the strife surrounding the Declaration on the Media was culminating in 1976, a commission was appointed with the brief of analysing existing problems relating to communication in the world and suggesting principles that might guide work towards a new world information order⁴ –from 1978 'a new world information and communication order', or NWICO⁵. The commission, chaired by the Irish politician, diplomat and Nobel Laureate Sean MacBride, submitted its final report, *Many Voices, One World. Communication and Society, Today and Tomorrow*, to Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, Director-General of UNESCO, just before the 1980 General Conference. The sharp differences that had characterized the discussions throughout the 1970s were also present in the MacBride Commission. Considering that it consisted of 16 members representing different ideologies, different political, economic and cultural systems, and different geographical areas, it was no small achievement for the Commission to manage to reach agreement on as many points as it did. Sean MacBride comments in his Foreword to *Many Voices, One World* that the members "reached what I consider a surprising measure of agreement on major issues, upon which opinions

2 The UNESCO Declaration on Fundamental Principles Concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthen Peace and International Understanding to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and the Incitement of War (1978). The Declaration may be seen as an attempt to formulate fundamental guidelines for the role of mass media in the international system.

3 Guiding principles on the use of satellite broadcasting for the free flow of information, the spread of education and greater cultural exchange.

4 The International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, or MacBride Commission, was appointed in 1976. One of its principal tasks was to "analyse communication problems, in their different aspects, within the perspective of the establishment of a new international economic order and of the measures to be taken to foster the institution of a 'new world information order'" (UNESCO Work Plan for 1977-1978, 19C/5 Approved, §4155).

5 UNESCO used the concept of a 'new world information order' for only two years. In the final version of the mass media declaration adopted in 1978 the phrasing is: "...a new, more just and effective world information and communication order". The change may be seen as a further adaptation to the position of the West, and as a retreat from a new order to improvements in the status quo.

heretofore had seemed irreconcilable" (xviii). Due to differences in the group, the report does not offer any specific proposals regarding communication policy principles. On the other hand, it does offer a good number of recommendations and suggestions aiming to bring about a "more just and more efficient world information and communication order". A majority of those who commented on the report, including many who were essentially critical, agreed that *Many Voices, One World* was the most thoroughgoing document of its kind on communication to have been produced in UNESCO's name (cf. Hamelink, 1980).

The Commission report stressed that it concerned not only developing countries, but the whole of humanity, because unless the necessary changes were made in all parts of the world, it would not be possible to attain freedom, reciprocity or independence in the exchange of information worldwide. The Commission confirmed the persistence of imbalances in news and information flows between countries and of marked inequalities in the distribution of communication resources. The Commission were agreed as to the necessity for change and that the current situation was "unacceptable to all" (xviii), but its members were unable to agree on a definition of the concept of a 'new world information and communication order' (NWICO), nor were they able to specify the link with a new international economic order, as they had been asked to do.

Above all, the Commission sought solutions whereby third world countries would develop and strengthen their independence, self-determination and cultural identity. They also explored ways to improve international news reporting and the conditions under which journalists operate. Several central proposals focused on the democratization of communication, i.e. issues relating to access and participation, and "the right to communicate" –actually a cluster of rights: "the right to be informed, the right to inform, the right to privacy, the right to participate in public communication" at all levels, international, national, local and individual, was strongly emphasized (265, 173).

Although its mandate embraced all forms of communication, the principal focus of the MacBride Commission rested on the mass media. The mobilizing capacity of the media was emphasized in relation to issues of national development, while the media's role as a source of continuity was emphasized in relation to cultural identity. The Commission described the media's contributions to social change and the preservation of national cultural identity. Thus, we find expressions of both change and integration perspectives. But in contrast to the international perspective of the third world countries, the approach of the MacBride Commission was decidedly national.

Overall, the Commission applied a development perspective to conditions in the third world. Most calls for action were addressed to the developing countries, whereas the role of the industrialized world was largely confined to that of donor. Although the Commission's recommendations were far more concrete than is common in UNESCO, only seldom did they refer to actors by name.

200 | That is to say, the recommendations were strategic in nature rather than action-oriented, which, it should be noted, were necessary if agreement was to be reached on the principles for a NWICO. With regard to commercialization of the mass media and measures to limit the activities of transnational companies, the Commission's recommendations were elevated to the systems level and formulated in very general terms. Thus, the report offered nothing in the way of a blueprint for change, which was a disappointment to many. On the other hand, the Commission did support many of the demands that the third world countries had formulated in 'the four Ds'.

When the time came for the work of the MacBride Commission to be debated at UNESCO's General Conference in 1980, it became apparent that Director-General M'Bow had changed his position. Previously a proponent of the third world countries' demands, he now assumed a role of mediator. The recommendations of the MacBride Commission were conspicuously absent from the agenda. Nonetheless, they were frequently referred to in the debate and influenced the formulation of what was to be known as 'the MacBride Resolution' that was the outcome of the Conference. For the first time, a UNESCO resolution set out the foundations of a new world information and communication order, or NWICO. It contained paragraphs on measures to remove hindrances and remedy other negative effects (monopolization and concentration), to promote freedom of information and freedom of the press, to provide for journalists' freedom and responsibility and to ensure a diversity of sources, to help preserve cultural identity, and to ensure the right to participate in information flows and access to information sources. All these elements were present, albeit in a more diluted form than in the MacBride report, not to mention the third world countries' demands for reform.

Of the focal themes in *Many Voices, One World*, only cultural identity is included in the resolution text. It proved impossible to reach agreement on independence, self-determination and the 'right to communicate'. The most far-reaching of the Commission's recommendations, those relating to democratization of communication, were reflected in three clauses on the right to participate in information flows and processes and to have a 'right to communicate'. The text was a grave disappointment to the non-aligned countries. The most concrete sections of the resolution had to do with development and aid. These emphases were further reinforced by the institution of an International Programme for Communication Development (IPDC), another indirect fruit of the MacBride Commission.

The UNESCO 1980 General Conference: a turning-point?

The 1980 General Conference approached amidst mounting uncertainty about the future of UNESCO. The third world's demands for radical reform of the prevailing information order were perceived by some in the West as a threat to the 'free world', i.e. as "freedom under attack" (Fascell, 1979). Many Western countries perceived the movement as an "effort by the Soviet Union and some Third

World countries to foster government control of media under the guise of a New World and Communication Order" (Goddard-Power, 1981: 142).

Meanwhile, fatigue was widespread within UNESCO, and many delegates felt that some change was necessary if the organization were to live on in keeping with its statutes. Media issues had dominated UNESCO's agenda for most of the 1970s, with wars of words and ideas being waged on two front lines: East vs. West and North vs. South. Towards the end of the decade there were even public doubts that UNESCO could be fully functional if the inflamed debate on communications media continued for much longer. Both the USA and Great Britain threatened to leave UNESCO on repeated occasions. Media issues were not the sole cause of this turmoil; the leadership style of Director-General M'Bow was also highly controversial and contributed to the deadlock (Gerbner, Mowlana and Nordenstreng, 1993).

By 1980 there was a general will, both among the countries of the Eastern and the Western blocs and within the third world, to reach some kind of a *modus vivendi* on media issues so that the atmosphere within UNESCO might normalize. Even the Soviet delegation showed signs of a willingness to compromise, a change in attitude deriving from the political repercussions of the country's invasion of Afghanistan the year before. It came as a surprise to many when UNESCO members at the 1980 meeting managed to agree on both a first draft of a NWICO and a development program (IPDC). In addition, third world countries met with much more support for their demands than ever before in a UNESCO document, even though the MacBride Commission's recommendations had been struck from the agenda. The work of the Commission had, however, cleared the path, which benefited the third world countries in several respects. The ideas of the non-aligned countries had won recognition. UNESCO members were able to agree on several fundamentals for a new world information and communication order, several of which corresponded with the intentions of the non-aligned countries. Surprisingly, even a clause on monopolization and concentration of the media won approval. The industrialized countries promised aid to help to build and develop communication systems in developing countries. One can take this as evidence that the third world advanced its position and that the NWICO concept had won some measure of acceptance. At the same time, the West put development and aid issues squarely on the agenda and managed to turn the focus away from their own roles and onto conditions in the third world countries. The international dimension was diluted, as it had been in the MacBride Commission's work. In this we can perceive a crossroads for UNESCO on the horizon, a point at which the organization would have to choose between continued work on a new information order and a more decided focus on development and aid issues.

From regulation to international aid

After 1980, UNESCO's General Conference adopted one international agreement having bearing on the information and communication sector (Right to

202 | Communicate, 1983). Otherwise, the only resolutions emanating from UNESCO related to the communication program, IPDC. These were clear indications of a different climate and different power relationships from those of the preceding decade, in which UNESCO produced no fewer than eight international agreements on information and communication. The bitter debates of the period over issues like freedom of information, social responsibility of the media, the free flow of information, news imperialism and, ultimately, a world information and communication order form a parenthesis in UNESCO's history to date. The NWICO question was dead, 'history', and practical development assistance moved to centre stage. The factors behind the change can be summarized in four points.

- » First, the MacBride Commission made a significant contribution by structuring the problem area, which made it possible to raise the intellectual level of the debate. The issues were made concrete through the solutions the Commission proposed. The Commission's emphasis on development was also a step in the direction of change.
- » Secondly, the institution of the IPDC became a symbol of the new emphasis on development and practical action, an emphasis that was to grow successively stronger during the 1980s as the development program progressed. Development aid was once again the prime focus. The Western countries were enthusiastic about the IPDC and considered it their work. There were very likely tactical motives behind their standpoint; an emphasis on practical assistance might serve to modify the demands of third world countries and reduce the severity of the ideological conflicts (Garbo, 1984; Goddard-Power, 1984; Harley, 1984; Nordenstreng, 1984). But were it not for the MacBride Commission's focus on development issues, it is not likely that the programme would have seen the light of day.
- » Third, the change in posture of UNESCO's Director-General in response to widespread criticism of his ineffective leadership and favouring of the developing countries was important in this context. The preoccupation with issues relating to the mass media had, what is more, nearly paralysed UNESCO. The survival and proper functioning of the organization required a change and forced the Director-General to modify his policy by, for example, striking the 82 recommendations of the MacBride report from the agenda in 1980, assuming instead the role of mediator.
- » Fourth, and finally, the friction subsided when the USA and Great Britain first threatened to leave and then left UNESCO in 1984 and 1985, respectively. The USA pointed to the work on the NWICO as one of its reasons for leaving the organization. After the 1980 meeting, the USA and other Western countries launched an anti-NWICO campaign. A document known as the Talloire Declaration, adopted by

an international conference arranged by the World Press Freedom Committee et alii in 1981, exemplifies the critique. UNESCO was also criticized for inefficiency and for having become 'politicized'. The prominence and influence of third world countries in UNESCO in the early 1980s, a result of Director-General M'Bow's policies, was a source of constant irritation (Bartelson and Ringmar, 1985). The USA had additional complaints, as well. The foreign policy of the newly installed Reagan Administration differed markedly from that of the Carter Administration (Gerbner, 1993; Levin, 1984). The exit of two major powers dealt a hard blow to UNESCO's finances, which resulted in a shift in the power constellation within the organization. The position of the Director-General was weakened, the Western countries advanced their position at the expense of third world countries, and the Eastern bloc was relatively passive.

Even after 1985, the third world countries continued their campaign for a NWICO, but to no avail. Their influence had been reduced, partly due to the fact that OPEC no longer wielded the same degree of influence on the oil market. Armed conflicts between several of the OPEC countries meant that the non-aligned countries could not muster a united front as they had in the 1970s. It was impossible for individual countries both to campaign for a NWICO and to seek more assistance from the countries that opposed it. As a consequence, at the 1989 General Conference NWICO was taken off the agenda once and for all, leaving the stage open for 'free flow' to make its comeback (cf. MacBride and Roach, 1993).

Full circle

The efforts of third world countries to bring about thoroughgoing reform of the information and communication order within the framework of UNESCO, the principal norm-setting international forum in this area, failed. A political idea had to be sacrificed for the sake of development assistance. The successively narrowing focus on aid issues in the 1980s represents a reversion to the thinking of the 1960s. In retrospect, one might say that policy came full circle with the institution of the IPDC communication programme in 1989. UNESCO's role vis-à-vis the developing countries was once again that of aid donor.

Thus, the issue of a new world information and communication order (NWICO) was apparently an expression of the spirit of the times, an era of ideological debate and conflict, a period in which power relationships on international markets were challenged and changed. The issue of a NWICO, as formulated in the 1970s within UNESCO, was an outgrowth of the two development paradigms and its ideological components. In a longer perspective, we also see that the 1970s formed a period of transition, from politics and ideology to market solutions.

The 1950s and '60s were, overall, optimistic. Wealthy countries prospered, poor countries gained their independence. People had faith in political solutions, believed in the promise of new technology and economic growth. But in the 1970s this faith weakened; ideological conflicts surfaced, the status quo was questioned, and collective solutions were advanced. The 1980s, then, saw the disintegration of many of the very institutions that had inspired optimism twenty and thirty years earlier. Deregulation, commercialization, consumerism and individualism became watchwords. The change was clearly linked to the advance of technology-driven globalization. Whereas a new economic world order could be discerned as early as the 1970s, it was only in the following decade that a new political world order emerged. The driving forces behind this latter metamorphosis were quite beyond the reach of the international political system; they were also, ideologically speaking, quite contrary to the thinking behind the NWICO concept.

Globalization in the media sector

Mass media play a decisive part in what we call the globalization process. Without the media and modern information technology, globalization as we know it today would not be possible. Access to various media, to telephony and to digital services, is often held to be crucial to our political, economic and cultural development. Free and independent media are also vital to the survival and development of democracy. Meanwhile, a good proportion of the people of the world lack electricity and access to telecommunications and are thereby condemned to marginalization.

The development of innovative information technologies and the ongoing processes of deregulation and concentration of ownership have spurred the pace of globalization. Specifically communications satellites and digitalization –not least the Internet– have had an enormous impact. These innovations have opened up worldwide markets for media products such as television programmes, films, news, games and advertising. They have been a *sine qua non* for the formation and proper functioning of global enterprises and flows of information across national frontiers. The production and distribution of media products are highly concentrated branches, with respect to both content and ownership. Meanwhile, traditional distinctions, between information and entertainment, between hardware and software, between product and distribution, are blurring.

Much of what could be discerned only vaguely on the horizon back in the 1970s is now upon us in full force. The volume of information we have at our disposal has multiplied many times over; it is available via many new players and many new channels in 'the new information society'. The relationships between the wealthy countries and the poor countries of the world that the MacBride Commission described at the end of the 1970s still seem to prevail, essentially unchanged, albeit some of the terminology is new. Today we speak of 'the digital divide', which, as Secretary-General Kofi Annan points out, actually consists of

several 'divides': a *technological divide* in terms of existing infrastructure; a *content divide* in the sense that much of the information available on the web lacks all relevance to people's real needs, while it also presumes fluency in English; a *gender divide*, in that women and girls generally have poorer access to information than men and boys; and a *commercial divide*, whereby electronic trading tends to strengthen the links between some countries, with the risk that others will be increasingly marginalized⁶.

Global actors in the media market

Much of the debate about a NWICO in the 1970s revolved around news flows across national frontiers. Studies made in the 1970s confirmed a decided imbalance in the flows between North and South. One of the main demands regarding a NWICO was the call for a more equitable and democratic flow of information; initially, this mainly meant flows of news.

The objects of the non-aligned countries' criticism were mainly the major wire services that operated worldwide: AP, AFP, dpa, Reuters and UPI. Because of their dominance they were held responsible for the 'one-way flow' of news and other information between North and South.

The international wire services were pioneers in the development of a global network. Having started up in the early 1850s, they were the first transnational media systems, products of modernity. They defined political and economic news, thereby creating a product that was sold, in different packaging, to political and economic elites, either directly or via the mass media, at home and in other parts of the world. The wire services developed information technologies in order to improve the global communications networks. Today, they distinguish themselves from other actors on the global market in that they both contribute to globalization and consolidate their own countries (Hjarvard, 2001).

Contemporary news flows differ from those in the 1970s in their much larger volume and greater diversification. But interest in using sources other than the major wire services is limited, so they have retained their privilege of defining what constitutes news. Particularly the market leaders AP and Reuters also supply Internet services with news copy. Here there is a natural link with the main sources of news film. The news market today is highly diversified and segmented into a number of subgenres –business news, sports news, entertainment news, medical news– and the Internet facilitates further development, in terms of both geographical extent and volume. But the content the services carry does not seem to have evolved to any notable extent. When CNN 'stole' a sizable share of the global market in the mid-1990s, the dominance of the USA in news reporting worldwide was the target of criticism, and researchers found that "the news seen on World Report is the same old news of the world" (Fluornoy and Stewart, 1997: 23).

⁶ Address by UN Secretary-General Annan to the World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva, December 10, 2003.

Some collaboration between established news agencies (EBU) and news agencies in the third world was established in the 1980s as a direct consequence of the NWICO debate. Danish media scholar Stig Hjarvard, who has studied the exchange of news footage within Eurovision, found that Asia (Asiavision) is the only region where the EBU regularly gathered news in the 1990s. Otherwise, use of third world sources was no more than sporadic. Less than 4% of the material carried by EBU's news exchange, EVN, in 1991 originated in regional collaboration with third world news organizations. To some extent, the sparse representation may be attributed to a scarcity of material that is of relevance to EBU's viewers. Hjarvard analysed the obstacles and disinterest that collaboration had met on the national level and commented that it seemed to occur despite, rather than as a result of, national policy. Interest resides among journalists, not governments (Hjarvard, 1995: 505).

But even if regional collaboration has not brought about any major changes, regionalization of news reporting has developed, particularly in the Arab world. The news service *Al Jazeera* is a case in point. But this is not to say that *Al Jazeera* is a major news source outside the Arab world.

An examination of the structure of the production and distribution of media products does not turn up any thoroughgoing changes since the 1970s as far as news flows are concerned. Researcher Oliver Boyd-Barrett presumes that nothing has changed and points out that the most problematic aspect today resides not so much in the skew geopolitical pattern of news diffusion, as in the effects of the very narrow range of news content carried, the focus on elites and conventional Western news values, conflict rather than stability, and events rather than processes (Boyd-Barrett, 1997). This is so despite the fact that, thanks to the Internet, many more different news sources around the world are available than was even conceivable 20-30 years ago. That is to say, there is an unprecedented potential for both more diverse and more extensive news flows.

Transnational media companies grow even bigger

Critics of the status quo in the 1970s took the concentration in the media sector and the threat to diversity that it posed as cause for demanding some form of international regulation of media markets. Since then, media corporations have grown considerably. Back in the 1970s, the objects of concern were the major wire services and, above all, film studios that operated on the international market, such as Columbia, Warner Brothers, Twentieth Century-Fox and United Artists—all based in the USA. Indeed, it is among these companies that we find the germ of many of the transnational corporations (TNC) that dominate the media market today. Some of these companies have taken advantage of deregulation and privatization over vast regions of the world and have purchased and fused with other companies to become global media conglomerates.

The TNCs operate on multiple levels, global channels spread the same message (in the same language), regional channels in local languages are estab-

lished, and technical systems are made available. A few transnational media companies, most of which are based in the USA or Europe, dominate the spread of media products. Their cultural presence is considerable on virtually every continent. Lately, they have begun to establish themselves in the developing countries. Together with the World Wide Web, the expansion of media TNCs has also increased the paramount status of English.

Table 1. The largest media corporations in the world by media sales volume in 2003 (USD billions)

1. AOL Time Warner	40	USA
2. News Corporation	19	Australia
3. Viacom Inc	19	USA
4. Walt Disney Comp.	18	USA
5. Vivendi Universal	18	France
6. Bertelsmann AG	15	Germany
7. Sony Corporation	12	Japan
8. Reed Elsevier	8	The Netherlands/Great Britain
9. ARD	7	Germany
10. NBC	7	USA

Source: Nordicom 2004.

Most of these companies are primarily involved in television and entertainment, but several also deal in news gathering and distribution. All control more than one medium and are thus able to advertise and sell their products in one medium or across others.

Both of the two transnational corporations in the third world are to be found in Latin America. They are *Globo* in Brazil and *Televisa* in Mexico, with volumes of roughly USD 2-3 billion each (*Variety* Aug 26-Sep 1, 2002 and Sep 15-21, 2003). Having started out in the newspaper branch, the two companies have now expanded into television, pay-TV, music publishing and book publishing.

The media have become increasingly commercialized over the past few decades. Market shares are worth a great deal of money. How economic transactions are organized and the degree of concentration of economic power in various branches play a decisive role in the globalization process. A country's place in the global pecking order is a function of its ability to compete on the world market. Competitive strength is not only a question of efficiency or economic rationality; many factors –political, social and economic– are involved. Samir Amin points out five different monopolies that the dominant actors make use of to maintain and strengthen their hold on the market and that together form the framework in which globalization takes place. The five monopolies relate to technology, finance, natural resources, media and communications, and weapons of mass destruction. In the case of the media and communications, Amin gives the following motives:

...[The media and communications] not only lead to uniformity of culture but also open up new means of political manipulation. The expansion of the modern media market is already one of the major components in the erosion of democratic practices in the West itself (Amin, 1997: 5).

The media situation in the third world: status quo?

The issues of cultural identity and the right to participate in international flows of information are related to both national media structures in the developing countries and the countries' links with the global system. The only concrete political result of the work on a NWICO within UNESCO was a focus on the development of national media in the third world through, among other things, increased development assistance.

Several countries in the third world still lack an adequate infrastructure for modern mass media. This hinders their development, while it also blocks their access to the international news and media system. The lack of electricity and telecommunications over much of the developing countries' territory is one key problem. Other hindrances reside in the realm of national media policy. Those who can change the situation are not always motivated to do so; those who want to change the situation are not always in a position to do so.

An examination of existing international statistics in the communications sector shows some improvement in third world countries since the 1970s, though in some more than others. For example, the density of radio and television receivers has risen, as has newspaper circulation. The broadcast media have expanded particularly markedly. In the mid-1960s UNESCO recommended that each country should have at least 20 TV sets, 50 radio receivers and 100 newspaper copies per thousand inhabitants. In 1980, the MacBride report notes that 100 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America had not reached these minimum standards by the mid-1970s. Ten years later, five countries were still below the three standards, and an additional 55 were below at least one of them. African countries predominated among these least developed countries with respect to the media (Beam, 1992). Ten years down the line, the figures have improved further –though only in some countries, and not others. Again, the poorest countries of Africa lag behind. In several developing countries, the pace of progress in the media sector has been quite slow, particularly in rural areas, where a majority of the people live.

**Table 2. Media densities in the world, 1970 and 1997,
Units per thousand inhabitants**

	Daily newspapers		Radio receivers		TV sets	
	1970	1996	1970	1997	1970	1997
The world, total	107	96	245	418	81	240
Africa	12	16	93	216	4.6	60
America	170	141	698	1,017	209	429
Asia	49	66	81	255	20	190
Europe	281	261	465	729	205	446
Oceania	269	227	779	1,071	188	427
Developing countries	29	60	90	245	9.9	157
Sub-Saharan Africa	10	12	83	202	1.5	48
Arab states	17	36	131	269	21	119
Latin America & Caribbean	76	101	196	412	57	205
Eastern Asia & Oceania	26	56	97	306	3.3	253
Southern Asia	12	33	34	118	0.9	54
Least developed countries	4.5	8	56	142	0.5	23
Developed countries	292	226	643	1,061	263	548

Source: UNESCO 2003 <<http://www.uis.unesco.org>>.

In the world as a whole, it is estimated that there are about 250 television sets per thousand inhabitants, a considerably higher figure than for those who have a telephone (Human Development Report, 2002). In less than a decade from the mid-1980s to the mid 1990s, the number of television channels in the world doubled, as did average viewing time and the number of TV sets in households. Satellite television is accessible worldwide; transnational satellite channels have vastly increased the volume of programming available to viewers, and numerous niche channels carry specialized content to various target audiences –not least young viewers. In developing countries, which have experienced rapid deregulation, many Western-style radio and television channels now serve urban areas. Feature films, serial drama, talk shows and music predominate. Still, not everyone has access to television. In the poorest countries the estimated density of television sets per thousand people is only 23.

Radio is still the medium that reaches the most people. The fact that a good share of the third world still lacks electricity makes radio crucially important outside urban areas. Between 1970 and 1997, the density of radio receivers in developing countries increased from 90 to 245 per thousand inhabitants.

In the interval 1970-1997, newspaper circulation in the developing countries doubled, from 29 to 60 per thousand. Circulation nearly doubled in the

210 | least developed countries as well: from 4.5 per thousand in 1970 to 8 per thousand in 1997. This is still far below the UNESCO recommendations in the mid-1960s (100 per 1,000 inhabitants).

The Internet is generally considered the cardinal example of ‘the digital revolution’. In 2003, an estimated 11% of the world’s population had access to the Internet (ITU, 2004). More than three-quarters of today’s Internet users are to be found in the wealthiest (OECD) countries, which have 14% of the world population. Only 1-2% are located in Africa. Thus, we find a huge gap between different parts of the world –‘the digital divide’ is as wide today as it ever was. Most prognosticators say that the new information technology will make a tremendous difference in the future, but that a majority of the world’s population will not have access to the net. The lack of telecommunications infrastructure in regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America will keep many people in the margins.

Table 3. Internet users and telephone subscribers per 100 inhabitants, 2003

	Internet users	Tele subscribers
Africa	2	9
Asia	7	29
America (North)	53	111
America (South)	8	40
Europe (East)	17	74
Europe (West)	40	144
Oceania	38	95

Source: ITU 2004 <<http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>>.

The Internet is known to be the younger generation’s medium par excellence. But in Africa, South America and a good part of Asia, the proportion of children and young people who have Internet access is only a couple of per cent. Meanwhile, roughly 90% of Swedish children have Internet access at home. Children and young people in the wealthiest countries of the world are a truly multimedia generation, whereas for many of the children in the world television is out of reach, and books are in short supply.

The IPDC was inaugurated to accelerate expansion of the mass media in the third world. But even after twenty years, the results of the programme are modest, to say the least. In some instances, support made possible through the IPDC has significantly contributed to regional news exchanges, and to some

extent it may be credited with having facilitated news gathering. But all too often, national media policy has stood in the way of international news exchange and news gathering across national frontiers.

IPDC operations have been criticized widely, and in 1995 reforms designed to make the programme more efficient got under way. But at the same time it is difficult to see how the IPDC can help to create functional media structures. The establishment of a modern communications infrastructure is much too costly for any one development programme. Deregulation in the third world has opened the door to competition, privatization and foreign ownership, but this route to development often implies new dependency relationships.

The conditions found in the third world in the 1970s are largely unchanged in the 100-odd countries that have experienced a slow pace of development and are still politically and economically dependent on other countries. In these countries, the situation described in the MacBride Commission's report still applies.

A third development paradigm

The new world information order, as formulated by the non-aligned countries, was clearly linked to the dependency paradigm, particularly the elements decolonization and demonopolization. But the documents also contained an indication of a new position in the countries' quest for their own paths toward development and communication; this had to do with independence, self-determination and cultural identity. The demand for a new international information order may be seen as a reaction to the modernization paradigm.

The MacBride Commission was clearly influenced by the non-aligned states' ideas. *Self-reliance* and *cultural identity* were key principles in the Commission's recommendations. Concepts like *access* and *participation* were made explicit. The Commission also introduced the local level and horizontal communication into thinking about development. There was also a hint of the idea that the causes of underdevelopment might be found in the developed and the developing countries alike. This 'new' view was also expressed in the IPDC resolution of 1980.

The MacBride Commission's recommendations were hardly unequivocal, however. The ambiguities were particularly apparent in the Commission's treatment of communication technology and technological development. Here, the Commission's thinking alternated between the modernization and dependency paradigms; the concept of neocolonialism confronted decolonialization. But, above all, the recommendations suggested a third, alternative concept of development.

In the early 1980s, some scholars and development experts began speaking of 'another development', a term first coined in 1978 in *Development Dialogue*, the journal published by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. Here, key concepts are *cultural identity* and *self-reliance*, and *access* and *participation*. This third approach may be characterized as a reaction to both the modernization and

212 | dependency paradigms. Universal models, which of necessity are always simplistic, were rejected in favour of an emphasis on the characteristics and needs of each individual country and the conviction that development efforts must start with specific conditions and needs. Social, economic, cultural and religious components of development were identified; and the focus rested more often on local conditions than on the nation or international relations. This is not to say that relationships of international interdependency were ignored. An oft-cited phrase was "Global problems, local solutions". Adherents of this approach also regarded traditional values as an important factor in fostering a sense of identity and meaning and a source of continuity in the face of social change. At the same time, democratic processes and regard for human rights were kept in focus (Hedebro, 1982; Kothari, 1984; Jayaweera, 1987; Kumar, 1994; Mowlana, 1988; Servaes, 1989; Yoon, 1996).

Most recently, much of the work with 'another development' has focused on the concept of *multiplicity*, introduced by Jan Servaes in the late 1980s. The focus on multiplicity has also entailed a focus on participatory communication for social change. The approach is normative. The researchers and field workers who subscribe to this school of thought often work on local projects to create the preconditions for new communicative situations, often on a 'grassroots' level.

The links between this third paradigm of development and the NWICO debate and the ideas implicit in the MacBride resolution are obvious. Concepts like self-reliance and cultural identity took their place on the international agenda and thus won political acceptance on the conceptual level. The MacBride Commission involved social scientists –sociologists, political scientists, educationalists, media scholars, and so forth– and other experts from all parts of the world, which ensured the inclusion of many of the concepts that were to recur in both theory and practice in ensuing decades. It is difficult, however, to distinguish cause from effect. In all probability the present position can be put down to the mutual exchanges between regions, academic disciplines, experts, politicians, etc., that the discussion of a NWICO and, not least, the MacBride Commission broke ground for.

In conclusion

The issue of a New World Information and Communication Order that occupied the UNESCO agenda in the 1970s is unique in that for once, international diplomacy and policy-makers acknowledged the international character of the media, their structures, world-views and markets.

Some of the developments during this past decade could be discerned on the horizon even when efforts were being made to create a NWICO. Indeed, increasing concentration of media ownership, monopolization of markets, and a decline in diversity were among the complaints that the third world countries and others raised. However, it was quite impossible to envisage the breadth and

depth of what was to come in the closing decades of the century. The globalization in the media system, spurred by deregulation and privatization, concentration, commercialization and, not least, new information technology, could not be foreseen in its manifold entirety. It was these developments that ultimately sealed the fate of the NWICO as an issue.

The globalization of the media has accelerated and the digital divide has widened in recent years, and international information and media issues are once again in focus on the international agenda. Even if the points of departure and terms of reference used today are quite different from those in the 1970s, 'development' is still bound up with the modernist project of the Western world. Today, however, solutions to the problems and issues are not sought in top-down steering and regulations on an international scale. Contemporary society is far too complex for that, and discourages the thought of 'a new international order' of the sort envisaged in the 1970s. We now see an era of multilevel governance of the media and communication system –an interplay between many different actors, public and private, on multiple levels, from the local to the global.

One of the main items on the global agenda today is the *World Summit on the Information Society, WSIS*. Arranged by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in partnership with, among others, UNESCO, under the high patronage of the UN Secretary-General, its anticipated outcome is "to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and a concrete plan of action for achieving the goals of the Information Society, while fully reflecting all the different interests at stake"⁷. Among the fundamental ideas behind the WSIS is an ambition to create a more inclusive Information Society and to bridge the digital divide in a North-South perspective.

Many have expressed concern that the WSIS has come to apply an increasingly technical perspective to issues relating to telecommunication and the Internet. Many voices, not least within the civil society, have called for more attention to the media, human rights and communication rights in the final document; that is to say, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and not least its Article 19, which emphasizes freedom of expression, and the principles of a free flow of information, a free circulation of ideas, freedom of the press, participation in the communication process, the right to communicate, cultural diversity, and so forth, are once again in focus. Critics have also seen a danger in marginalizing traditional media, as the WSIS has tended to do. They point to negative consequences, particularly in the poorest countries, not least relating to the advancement of human rights.

When the final WSIS document is adopted in 2005, 25 years will have passed since the MacBride Commission submitted its report to UNESCO. Like the MacBride Commission in 1985, the WSIS has identified important issues and problem areas with regard to global information and communication. Regardless

7 <www.itu.int/wsis/basic/about>.

- 214 | of one's overall judgement, the WSIS also must be credited with new thinking with respect to how information and communication issues may be handled in the global arena; the governance perspective is truly something new. However, it will require hard work to ensure that the information society, or the knowledge society in UNESCO's parlance, stands for the attainment of basic economic, social and political rights for people around the world. The significance of the WSIS will depend on the extent to which national governments, the private sector, the civil society and other relevant stakeholders are brought into the continued work towards these goals.